



Mary Wells

*Never, Never Leave Me/
The 20th Century Sides*

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Soul Classics

Mary Wells

Never, Never Leave Me The 20th Century Sides



1	<i>Ain't It The Truth</i>	2:57
2	<i>Stop Takin' Me For Granted</i>	2:13
3	<i>How Can I Forget Him</i>	2:27
4	<i>Use Your Head</i>	2:08
5	<i>Everlovin' Boy</i>	2:22
6	<i>Jive Guy</i>	2:30
7	<i>My Mind's Made Up</i>	2:29
8	<i>We're Just Two Of A Kind</i>	2:20
9	<i>He's Good Enough For Me</i>	2:27
10	<i>Never, Never Leave Me</i>	2:44
11	<i>Why Don't You Let Yourself Go</i>	2:23
12	<i>He's A Lover</i>	2:37
13	<i>Me Without You</i>	2:30
14	<i>I'm Learnin'</i>	2:37
15	<i>I'm Sorry</i>	2:14
16	<i>Say What You Gotta Say</i>	2:22
17	<i>Memories Are Creeping Up On Me</i>	3:13
18	<i>Time After Time</i>	2:57

To the uninitiated, Mary Wells is sadly thought of as a "one-hit wonder," such was the international success of "My Guy" (issued by Motown Records in March 1964 and still a staple on oldies radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic). As a result, the general public may consider that the classic song eclipses everything Mary did before or after that recording.

Mary's many dedicated fans know differently however; hot on the heels of the January 1995 release of *Dear Lover/The Atco Sessions* (SCL 2509), requests were made of Ichiban's Soul Classics to release material from Mary's fifteen month-period with 20th Century Records that preceded her relatively brief stint with Atco. Those requests were thankfully granted and this 18-track compilation features Mary's entire eponymously-titled album for the label (issued originally in March 1965); plus a non-album "B" side; both sides of a later single; and, as a double delight for Mary's fans, three previously unreleased tracks found way down deep in the vaults.

continues inside...



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...continued from tray card

Although not a raw-voiced deep emotive wailer, the late Mary Wells exuded plenty of soul with her smooth, silky vocals, which over the years, developed a sultry huskiness. She had the ability to convey both warmth and evoke spine-tingling chills at the same time, and transmit sensuality via even the most mundane lyric.

Born in Detroit on May 13, 1943, Mary was singing in church at the age of three and muscling her way into male-dominated, street-corner doo-wop groups in her early teens. Singer Johnnie Mae Matthews claims to have 'discovered' Mary when she was fourteen but, although Matthews ran her own Northern record label, there is no evidence of Mary's voice being committed to wax at that time.

Seemingly, that had to wait a further three years until she was introduced as a songwriter to Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. by Robert Bateman, a member of Motown group The Satintones, who was busy developing his own writing and production skills. Gordy urged Mary to sing him one of her songs, "Bye Bye Baby" (written with then-hitmaker Jackie Wilson in mind). He liked her style and signed her on the spot, not as a songwriter but as a vocalist. The terms of that signing were ultimately to play a major part in the recordings included here.

Mary's own version of "Bye Bye Baby" made its debut on *Billboard's* R&B chart on December 19, 1960 and over the next three years, a further eight entries would follow, all hitting both the Hot 100 pop chart and the R&B Top 10 (including two chartoppers and a No.2 entry). On May 16, 1964, three days after her twenty-first birthday, Mary topped the Hot 100 with "My Guy." Gordy, who claimed to have bought her a \$5,000 mink stole as a birthday gift, had groomed Mary extravagantly to be Motown's first 'queen': he was unaware that as "My Guy" was jumping up the charts, she was planning to abdicate in favor of what looked like greener pastures and broader horizons.

Thus begins the relevant chapter in Mary's recording career, documented on this compilation...

To understand Mary's move from Motown, knowledge of her personal circumstances at the time might prove relevant. Mary had married Herman Griffin, a singer whom Berry Gordy had recorded on singles for the Hob and Columbia labels (in 1959 and 1960 respectively) before rejoining his Columbia 45 on Tamla, thus bringing him on board as a member of the Motown 'family.'

Lack of fortune disillusioned Griffin and various accounts suggest that he became somewhat disgruntled by his background role as a staff writer and thus not what Gordy would have considered a 'family' man. Meanwhile, Mary's success may have begun to affect her attitude towards Motown and in light of the response to "My Guy," she began to query whether she was getting fully recompensed by the label for what she had contributed.

Encouraged by Griffin and aided by business advisor Robert West, she allowed herself to be courted by other companies. An offer from Atlantic Records was almost accepted when Morty Craft, then president of 20th Century Records stepped in with the verbal promise to make her not just a singing star but a film star too.

Craft later admitted to trickery. The nebulous offer of film parts was never put in writing, but nevertheless a reported advance of between \$200,000 and \$500,000 (depending on the source to which one refers) was a most attractive offer to a young lady who had previously seen very little in the way of actual financial returns for her successful recording activities.

The deal was done but first Mary had to be free of Motown. Citing her contract as 'invalid' due to being under age at the time of signing, a notice of 'disaffirmation and repudiation' was given to Motown. Expecting to sign a new contract with Mary, effective from her 21st birthday, this action came as a shock to Berry Gordy, who considered Mary a Motown 'creation' - his creation - and space was taken in both *Billboard* and *Cashbox* asserting 'Mary Wells is still under contract to Motown and not free to negotiate with other labels.

A court case ensued with Gordy claiming a debt of \$300,000 as owed to Motown for 'training and promotion.' The judge found in Mary's favor and, on September 16, 1964, Mary



was in New York City at Bell Sound Studios - where hits by artists like Dionne Warwick, Garnet Mimms, and many others had been recorded - cutting her first tracks for 20th Century.

Unfortunately, not a lot of detail remains available on recording dates and personnel for Mary's work with 20th Century, hampered by the fact that the record label no longer exists. But we do know that "Ain't It The Truth" and "Stop Takin' Me For Granted," coupled together as the first single (released in October 1964) and "How Can I Forget Him" were recorded at that initial session with Bob Bateman. (Mary's old pre-Motown mentor) at the production helm.

Sales of the first single were split as certain d.j.s opted to play the softer "Stop Takin' Me For Granted" over the official "A" side, "Ain't It The Truth," a much more solid slab of rhythm-and-blues than her Motown confections. The track featured almost gospel-style backing vocals and was penned by Lou Courtney - later a recording artist in his own right - and credited to "Peques," his original surname.

The follow-up, "Use Your Head" was produced by Detroit-based Andre Williams (who also had some minor success as an artist in the '60s) and was a real throwback to the Motown sound, much in the imitative vein that Chess Records had used with the likes of Jackie Ross and "Selfish One"; in retrospect, it would probably have been a better initial outing.

Coupled with songwriter Rudy Clark's "Everlovin' Boy" - one of the highpoints in this collection - the single's tenure on the charts was strong but relatively short. A more substantial chart appearance was achieved with the third single, "Never, Never Leave Me," the wistful ballad beauty that opens this set. The single hit the *No. 15* spot on *Billboard's* R&B chart and *No. 54* on the pop listings, later inspiring a '70s version by Geraldine Hunt on Roulette Records. The record's flipside, another Rudy Clark composition, "Why Don't You Let Yourself Go" took Mary back to her familiar Motown-esque style.

Sadly, Mary's chart run at 20th Century dried up and although her early recordings for the label were all strong in their own way, she was unable to replicate her success at Motown; rumors suggested that Motown had tried to put pressure on d.j.'s not to play her records although in reality, the first three singles charted with some significance.

Although there was no further mention of a film career, 20th Century continued the record releases. With a somewhat ironic opening lyric line ("some people talk about *my* guy"), "He's A Lover" came next backed by "I'm Learnin'" (a tune penned by Smith and Miner, responsible in September 1965 for Fontella Bass' "Rescue Me"), a track never included on Mary's first album.

Bob Bateman was credited as producer for "He's A Lover" and although his name does not appear on the album, he most likely produced "We're Just Two Of A Kind," a Van McCoy-penned lilter and the similarly slanted "He's Good Enough For Me." We do know he produced the bouncy Brill Building-style pop-sounding "How Can I Forget Him" and the contrastingly tougher "My Mind's Made Up," a song written by the team of Detroit writer and artist Sidney Barnes and New York-based J.J. Jackson (a hitmaker in his own right in 1966 with "But It's Alright").

Producer Bateman recalls the newly-uncovered "Jive Guy," (recorded at the same time as "My Mind's Made Up") as having an arrangement typical of the style Jackson employed; the brassy mid-tempo opus which might well have been 'sweetened' with strings had it made it to finished article status.

The closing tune on Mary's first 20th Century album is of considerable interest, not least because it is so different from anything else contained here or on the original LP. With "Time After Time," Mary demonstrated her ability to take a standard, and thanks to a big band treatment, give it a confident jazzy feel.

The track may have hinted at a future direction that both Mary and the label had in mind but, instead they opted to tread with caution by doing an album of Beatles' compositions, arranged by Joe Mazzu (who had likely performed the same chores for "Time After Time") and produced by Bernie Wayne. Along with the single pairing of "I Should Have Known Better" and "Please Please Me," *Love Songs To The Beatles* (20th Century 3178) was issued in October 1965 but although pleasant, it did not exploit the potential that seemed clearly evident on "Time After Time." It's worth noting that, with Mazzu again handling the arrangements, Mary finally did tackle more standards via side two of her *Two Sides Of Mary Wells* album on Atco although - in this writer's opinion - she never topped her performance on the standard included here.

Before the 'Beatles sessions' however, another single was released. The lilting "Me Without You" probably missed having a chart appearance by having no immediate successful predecessor: the adage, 'you're only as good as your last hit' had much more relevance in the mid-'60s than it does now when performers frequently spend years, rather than months, between album releases.

"I'm Sorry," the flipside of what would be Mary's final single for the label, was recorded at the same time as the two hitherto unreleased tracks, "Say What You Gotta Say" and "Memories Are Creeping Up On Me" (another Barnes/Jackson composition), which has an early '60s sound, complete with trademark Motown tambourine.

Apparently, Mary had contracted tuberculosis around this time and some 'questionable' notes suggest that she was vocally tired, although the male and female backup singers (whose ranks clearly include Dee Dee Warwick, sister of Dionne whose vocal sound is instantly recognizable on this and many of the other tunes Mary recorded at Bell Sound) offer strong support and balance.

Mary Wells ceased being a 20th Century recording artist towards the end of 1965 although the label did reissue her first album on their budget line, Movietone in 1966 under the tag *Oooh!*. The hits had stopped and the films had failed to start and the parting was apparently without rancor. She moved on to Atco Records, attaining immediate success with "Dear Lover" in February 1966, and although subsequent recordings for Atco (documented on Ichiban/Soul Classics' *Dear Lover/The Atco Sessions*) were musically sound, the label failed to keep the momentum going. With Atlantic (Atco's parent company) putting its attention on

Aretha Franklin - who had signed with the label in late '66 and begun having success in early '67 - it became apparent that Mary would no longer receive the attention her recording endeavors required. She moved on to Jubilee Records, where she scored some success. Further product appeared over the years on Reprise, Epic, 51 West, Allegiance, while signings to Chi-Sound and Philadelphia International were apparently fruitless.

In the '80s, the British-based Motorcity label released product on Mary who continued to tour, sounding better and certainly huskier than ever (thanks, no doubt, to her being a two-pack-a-day smoker). Alas, in 1990, throat cancer was diagnosed; the crippling medical fees could not be met from record royalties, and through the efforts of rock star Bruce Springsteen, Diana Ross, other artists, and the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, a fund was set up, with benefit concerts staged to provide assistance with funds.

Although at one stage it appeared that Mary was winning the fight, she finally succumbed and passed away on July 26, 1992 at the age of 49. Diana Ross and Levi Stubbs (of the Four Tops) had been among star visitors to her bedside and at her funeral, Smokey Robinson sang "You Beat Me To The Punch" and "My Guy," two of the songs he'd written that had been permanently associated with Mary.

In her book *Nowhere To Run*, Gerri Hershey tells how Wilson Pickett recounted, "You play me the record 'My Guy' and I swear I can see Mary Wells as a young girl. There she is, leaning against a brick wall in Detroit, those big eyes, a short, tight mohair skirt. Oooh, she had a walk..." And, oooh, she had a voice!

November 1995

David Cole

David Cole is Editor of the U.K. magazine *In The Basement*

Soul Classics

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Mary Wells • Never, Never Leave Me/ The 20th Century Sides

1. Ain't It The Truth 2:57 (A)* (Peques)

Recorded September 16, 1964,
Bell Sound Studios, New York City
Issued as 20th Century single 544, 10/64;
Pop/R&B #45

2. Stop Takin' Me For Granted 2:13 (A)* (Gentile-Lambert)

Recorded September 16, 1964,
Bell Sound Studios, New York City
Issued as "B" side to 20th Century single 544,
10/64; *Pop/R&B #88*

3. How Can I Forget Him 2:27 (A)* (Peques-Feldman-Goldstein-Gottetrrer)

Recorded September 16, 1964,
Bell Sound Studios, New York City

4. Use Your Head 2:08 (A) (Strong-Flemons-Barksdale)

Produced by Andre Williams
Issued as 20th Century single 555, 1/65;
Pop #34, R&B #13

5. Everlovin' Boy 2:22 (A) (Clark)

Produced by Andre Williams
Issued as "B" side to 20th Century single 555, 1/65

6. Jive Guy 2:30 (C)* (Barnes-Jackson)

Recorded March 2, 1965, Bell Sound Studios,
New York City

7. My Mind's Made Up 2:29 (A)* (Barnes-Jackson)

Recorded March 2, 1965, Bell Sound Studios,
New York City

8. We're Just Two Of A Kind 2:20 (A) (McCoy)

No producer listed

9. He's Good Enough For Me 2:27 (A) (Goodman)

No producer listed

10. Never, Never Leave Me 2:44 (A) (Gentile-Lambert)

No producer listed
Issued as 20th Century single 570, 3/65;
Pop #54, R&B #15

11. Why Don't You Let Yourself Go 2:23 (A) (Clark)

No producer listed
Issued as "B" side to 20th Century single 570,
3/65; *Pop #105*

12. He's A Lover 2:37 (A) (Miller-Porter)

No producer listed
Issued as 20th Century single 590, 6/65; *Pop #74*

13. Me Without You 2:30 (B)* (Barnes-Jackson)

Issued as 20th Century single 606, 9/65; *Pop #95*

14. I'm Learnin' 2:37 (B)* (C.Smith-R.Miner)

Issued as "B" side to 20th Century single 590, 6/65

15. I'm Sorry 2:14 (B)* (Bateman-Hollon-Moseley)

Recorded July 16, 1965, Bell Sound Studios,
New York City
Issued as "B" side to 20th Century single 606, 9/65

16. Say What You Gotta Say 2:22 (C)* (Bateman-Hollon-Moseley)

Recorded July 16, 1965, Bell Sound Studios,
New York City

17. Memories Are Creeping Up On Me 3:13 (C)*

(Barnes-Jackson)
Recorded July 16, 1965, Bell Sound Studios,
New York City

18. Time After Time 2:57 (A) (Styne-Cahn)

No producer listed

Legend:

(A) From LP *Mary Wells*, 20th Century 4171,
issued 1965

(B) Non-album singles

(C) Previously unreleased

* Produced by Bob Bateman

All Tracks Produced Under License From PolyGram Special Markets

All tracks are in mono since no stereo tapes could be located; tracks 1-12, 13, and 15-18 were transferred from original master tapes; since no tape could be found for track 14, it was transferred from a digitally-remastered CD source.

Note: Information in italics indicates peak positions on *Billboard's* R&B Singles and "Hot 100" charts respectively - courtesy *Billboard* Publications, Inc. and Joel Whitburn's Record Research Publications.

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